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Selected Poems

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Cambodian, Laotian,
and Vietnamese
Americans (NAFEA)

Selected Poems

by
Samy Elisabeth Yang

Green Pastel

Luminescent waves
wash through me;
spirits
flow from eyes to fingers
and all around
bright colors
glow; a temporary
balm,
gladness of
self—
sink into the earth.

Hmong Clothes

I don't understand why I was born Hmong
when I have an American attitude and I browse through
a culture that chose to leave its homeland for greener pastures
but then
decides to blame me for not knowing Hmong customs,
for not wearing Hmong clothes,
for speaking English or Hmonglish instead of just plain Hmong.

But you must agree with me
that Hmong language is insufficient
for describing everything you want to:
depression, computers, email, shocks to the system, poetry in the veins,



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feelings beyond "I'm happy, I'm sad, I'm angry, I'm in love,"
a hundred million tiny cells that make up our bodies,
books on philosophy,
colors like fuchsia, cerulean,
aquamarine, lavender.

Although I confess, *kwv txhiaj* is poetic and beautiful
once you study the old language.

But how can they look down on me for not knowing how to speak proper Hmong
when their proper-Hmong-speaking children
can't even find a way to tell their parents
that they're gay?

Why was I ashamed and embarrassed when the news spread
about Chai Vang,
why is it that whenever I see Hmong kids making a ruckus in public
I always glance around to see if anyone is thinking,
Damn uncivilized savages.

And why the hell do I always feel so conspicuous when
I'm at a restaurant with all white people
and I see them looking at me?
I want to jump on my table and scream:
YEAH, THIS CHINKY GIRL KNOWS HOW TO USE HER KNIFE AND FORK TOO!

But here's a secret:
I love wearing Hmong clothes except
they make me look fat
and Hollywood makes me feel shitty
about myself,
which means Hmong clothes make me feel shitty

but only when I'm around judging eyes because
when I'm alone and I wear Hmong clothes

I feel beautiful.

About the Author

Samy Elisabeth Yang lives in the Midwest. She enjoys writing, poetry, and photography.



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